THE Reconstructionist

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REALITIES AND VALUES *CORRESPONDENCE*

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the Reconstructionist

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EDITORIALS

HOW CELEBRATE V-E DAY?

THE official assurance that V-E Day is imminent prompts reflection on the spirit in which it should be observed. The fact that even after V-E Day, we shall still have a long and bloody road to travel before the final victory should be enough to temper our jubilation. We cannot abandon ourselves to unrestrained hilarity over the termination of the war in one theatre of operations, while the "blood, sweat and tears" flow without let in another. Who but the insensate can give himself over to unrestrained revelry in the face of the morrow's grim casualty list?

For us Jews in particular, V-E Day seems to call for a chastened and subdued celebration, for the recitation of less than the whole Hallel, for a *gilah bir'adah,* a tremulous rejoicing. True, it will mark the crushing, ignominious defeat of the most ruthless enemy the Jew has ever faced. But our people will emerge from the war with grievous wounds and amputations. Eastern European Jewry is a ruin. This central reservoir out of which there came in the last half century the idealism and sinew that went into the building of the Yishuv, the numbers that have made us here in America the largest Jewish community in the world, — this human reservoir, so rich in history and Jewish culture, is a charred fragment of its former thriving self. The knowledge that a third of our people has been destroyed since the Nazis made war upon us will inevitably give an undertone of mourning to our expressions of gratitude.

Moreover, we cannot dispel certain forebodings. For our enemy has not by any means been defeated in all the objectives of his war against the Jews. He has succeeded only too well in scattering his poisoned seed of anti-Semitism throughout the world.

But, though we cannot wholly dismiss grief and anxiety on V-E Day, though we cannot look upon it as an occasion for riotous mirth, we would be ungrateful, indeed, not to respond to the hope and cheer that it betokens. It marks a great victory for us. The success of Allied arms against Germany has won life for Israel. The power that threatened to bestride the world and came within a hair's breadth of making good its vauntings will have met its doom on V-E Day. The "new order" that was to have endured for a thousand years was stillborn. An ancient people, small and weak, sentenced to death by that "new order," has been redeemed to outlive its

would-be destroyers. The sentence has been reversed; it is the Nazi accuser who now stands convicted. While the cost has been fearful, we shall know on V-E Day that the ancient miracle of Irsael's redemption and survival has been reenacted in our time.

It is, therefore, fitting that, whatever else we may do in celebration of the occasion, we devote part of the day to worship. The Synagogue Council has asked Jews to gather in the synagogue on V-E Day for religious services. Let us respond to that call; let us seek to impress on our souls the full meaning of the occasion, its cost, the opportunities it opens up, the duties it lays before us, the promise it holds out to us. Our hearts will then respond to the occasion with the sentiment of the Psalmist when he said: "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad on it."

NOT A TIME TO RELAX

IT is well that, while we are waiting expectantly for V-E Day to be announced, we are also looking forward to the opening of the United Nations Conference in San Francisco on the 25th of this month. For that conference is a much needed reminder that V-E Day does not mean the end of the war and certainly not the accomplishment of our war aims. A vast amount of unfinished business remains to be done. In the first place, the war against Japan will have to be waged to a victorious conclusion. But that is only one item in a crowded agenda of tasks that must be completed before the world war can be liquidated, the Nazi conspiracy against mankind foiled and a genuine peace established.

We must, therefore, be on our guard against the natural but dangerous tendency to seek relaxation, after the victory in Europe, from the tension and strain of the war years. Before we can permit ourselves to regard the war as ended, we must go through a process of reconversion, not only of economic reconversion but of social and psychological reconversion as well. That means the utilization, for purposes of peace, of the resources and experiences acquired in the course of the war. Leaving to the experts the problem of what shall be done with our acquired economic resources, let us consider some of the moral resources that must be converted from war time to peace time use.

First of these is the sense of international unity. The United Nations must never again be divided. Never again dare we lapse into a selfish isolationism. Our war time alliance must be converted into a permanent arrangement for peace-time collaboration.

Then there is the recognition of the need for social and economic planning on a vast scale. The remarkable expansion of our national productive capacity during the war was made possible by the submission of individual interests to public regulation for the common good. But when the immediate threat of foreign domination is past, there may again arise clamor for a return to the "normalcy" of the pre-war days, to the era of predatory capitalism that made men lose faith in democracy and turn to fascism as an alternative. Peace conditions will call for changes in our economic plans, but the need for economic planning will persist. We dare not relax all social controls.

We can here only call attention in passing to these general problems involved in the liquidation of the war enterprise. They are more fully discussed in the general press. But we mention them to drive home the thought that, as Jews, we face a similar situation in our

war for survival. In that war too, the time for relaxation of effort has not arrived. We dare not feel that, with the defeat of Germany and the Hitler gang, the Jewish problem has been solved. We too must not forget the lessons of the war even after hostilities cease. We too have our problem of reconversion.

As the nations in general must remember that this is "one world," so Jews must remember that Israel is *"goy ehad ba-aretz,"* "one people throughout the world." Even during the war, some Jewish circles have been disposed to view the Jewish problem from an American isolationist standpoint, to shed responsibility for the welfare of "foreign" Jews by denying the very existence of a Jewish people. They have maintained the fiction that Jewry is an aggregate of individuals who happen to have some religious tenets in common. Their program calls only for the recognition of the right of Jews to be treated as human beings, but not for the right of Israel as a people to a free and secure existence. They have learned nothing from Hitler's war against Jewry. They look forward to the peace as a return to the pre-war status of the Jews, or rather to the pre-war lack of status, to the very situation that tempted and made possible Hitler's assault on Jewry.

In the fight against nazism, Jews cannot consider themselves victorious until they have achieved for the Jewish people and Jewish religion a recognized, dignified and secure position. That will not be until Jews have a commonwealth of their own in Palestine and full freedom to live as Jews in other countries, to organize their own community life, to advance their own culture, to cherish their spiritual ties with their homeland and with their fellow Jews all over the world.

Keeping pace with the expanding productive capacity of America, the communal activity of American Jewry has also expanded during the war. There has been a great awakening of the sense of communal responsibility. This has manifested itself in the organization of the American Jewish Conference, and of the National Community Relations Advisory Council, in the phenomenal growth of the Zionist movement, in the extended activities of the Jewish Welfare Board and in the increased contributions to the United Palestine Appeal and the Joint Distribution Committee. Shall this expanded social machinery be scrapped after the war? Shall the scope of our communal activity contract and our interest revert to mere limited local objectives and issues?

The situation clearly calls for more, not less, long-range social planning on the part of American Jewry after the war. In view of our responsibilities as the most numerous and influential Jewry in the whole diaspora, we can no longer tolerate conditions of chaos and disintegration such as have heretofore prevailed in American Jewish life. Without a unified communal organization for American Jewry, we cannot discharge our obligations to the Jewish cause throughout the world; we cannot even wage our own fight against anti-Semitism in America, against the native brands of fascism which are almost certain to emerge in the trying period of post-war readjustment. The need for Jewish unity is urgent; the cry for Jewish unity is insistent; the effort to achieve a unified and disciplined Jewish community life must be speeded up.

V-E Day must, therefore, not be for us a signal for a slackening of endeavor. It should serve rather as a happy omen, encouraging us to renewed exertions, until the American and the Jewish objectives of the war are achieved and a just and lasting peace finally established.

THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE

ACCORDING to the first issue of its news bulletin, the United Synagogue of America has been reorganized. A new president, Samuel Rothstein of New York, has taken office; and an executive director will soon be appointed. There is every indication that the new administration is eager to revitalize the United Synagogue.

These evidences of renewed vigor and enthusiasm are certainly welcome. The United Synagogue, representing about three hundred Conservative synagogues throughout the United States and Canada, has never, even according to its closest friends, fulfilled its potentialities. Although the number of its affiliated congregations has been increasing, slowly but steadily, the program of the organization has not quite measured up to the promise it showed when Dr. Solomon Schechter called it into being more than twenty-five years ago.

The reasons given for this condition have been various, ranging from the character of the personnel to the failure to mobilize sufficient financial backing. But the most basic cause for the failure of the United Synagogue to become a vital force in American Jewish life, it seems to us, was a wrong conception, on the part of American Jews, of the function of the United Synagogue, which its leaders did nothing to dispel.

American Jews expected of the United Synagogue that it should be the lay organization representing "Conservatism." Most American Jews of this generation assume that Judaism is, by nature, divided (like Gaul) into three parts: Reform, Orthodox and Conservative. The Orthodox and the Reform groups are represented, respectively, by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. These two groups were easily identifiable by the program and principles enunciated by their respective leaders, by the prayerbooks used in their synagogues, by the text books used in their schools. It was naturally expected that the Conservative group would constitute a third category, creating the kind of program and the instruments for carrying it out which would correspond to those created by the other two groups.

The United Synagogue did not live up to these expectations. Except for its broad purpose, as expressed in the words, "the promotion of traditional Judaism in America," no articulation of program or principles ever emerged. In addition, very little was done to implement the expressed purpose. In the field of liturgy, the United Synagogue prayerbook for the Festivals stands alone; and its most distinctive achievement is the change in the tense of one verb in one limited edition. This verb is found in a passage dealing with the sacrificial system; instead of praying for its restoration, the worshiper recalls the existence of that system in the past. (Even this change was not carried through consistently.) In the field of education, a handful of publications may be listed; as a rule, however, the schools associated with the United Synagogue make use of the texts published by the Reform Union, or by individual authors in cooperation with private publishing firms.

To assert, baldly, that the United Synagogue did not live up to expectations, however, does not quite do it justice. It must be explained that the United Synagogue *could not,* by its very nature, accomplish what American Jewry expected of it, because the constituent elements within the organization represented a wide variety of viewpoints and emphases. What these varied elements had most in common was their negations: the rejec-

tion of Reform and the dissatisfaction with Orthodoxy. If the leaders had attempted to formulate a philosophy for the entire organization, many congregations would have been compelled to withdraw. Yet the fact that the United Synagogue failed to formulate a clear philosophy was bound to reflect adversely upon it.

Thus the United Synagogue fell between two stools: to crystallize a philosophy would have meant a fatal split; not to crystallize a philosophy would have spelled inadequacy, by the yardstick of popular misconception of what the United Synagogue should stand for. The dilemma resulted in the inability to grow and to create. The organization seemed doomed to sterility.

Now that the United Synagogue has been reorganized, the leaders assume very likely that an infusion of new life will result spontaneously. We believe, therefore, that it is necessary to warn the new administration that, while a healthy financial condition is certainly indispensable to growth, and younger and more vigorous leadership is by all means desirable, the conditions for revival are not met unless a new attitude is taken toward the role of the United Synagogue in American Judaism.

This new attitude must express itself in the formal adoption of a set of principles which shall serve to unite, in creative unity, a diversity of viewpoints. The organization has always recognized as a reality the differing attitudes represented within its membership. But now, instead of using that diversity as the occasion for avoiding the adoption of a set of principles, it should proceed to incorporate that reality *into* its set of principles. It should, in other words, make the principle of *diversity within unity* the basic plank of its platform.

This set of principles should not, however, attempt to express affirmatively the ideas which differentiate the United Synagogue from the Reform or Orthodox groups. The purpose should *not* be to establish a third *denomination.* The purpose *should* be to set forth those broad affirmations, of a positive nature, which the constituent members of the United Synagogue regard as indispensable for the future of Judaism in America; and to commit themselves to cooperate to the maximum in translating those affirmations into living realities.

We suggest five affirmations, which might form the basis for such a declaration of principles: 1) *The centrality of religion in Jewish life.* This implies that, while Jewish life cannot be limited to ritual and worship, and secular interests must constitute a large part of Jewish activity, religious motivations and religious expression must give the temper and the quality to the whole. 2) *The indispensability of Zionism.* This means that, without a vital and creative center for Jewish civilization in Palestine, there can be no vigorous Judaism throughout the world. 3) *The permanent character of the American Jewish scene.* This implies that a normal life can be achieved for Jews outside Palestine, and that Judaism can have a future in the diaspora. 4) *The plenitude of Jewish culture.* This means that maximum education is needed and desired, and that Jewish life can and must be expressed in the arts and in the Hebrew language. 5) *The importance of scholarship.* This implies the encouragement of all types of investigation into the Jewish past *and present,* as means of self-knowledge and, ultimately, of self-improvement.

Within the framework of these affirmations, the congregations of the United Synagogue can unite; and if sincere hospitality is extended to various interpretations and implementations of them, the

United Synagogue can become an influence for broad vision, for creative action, and for the revitalization of Jewish life in America.

REALITIES AND VALUES

THE FEW SURVIVING JEWS OF Frankfurt, Cologne and Trier, who, for the first time in ten years, were able to celebrate the Seder on Pesah through the hospitality of the United States Army, hardly needed the admonition of the Haggadah to consider themselves as having personally experienced the Exodus from Egypt. It was for them literally, and not merely symbolically, *zeman herutenu,* "the time of our liberation," a time of deliverance "from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to feasting, from darkness to bright light, from bondage to redemption."

▼

IN THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT, Lord Devonshire, Under-Secretary for Colonial Affairs, defended the British exclusion of Jewish immigration to Palestine on the ground that "a great many Jewish refugees do not want to proceed to Palestine." He implied that they would be satisfied with repatriation after the war. But listen to what *someone who knows* has said about that. He is Carl Winkler, one of the Jews liberated by the conquest of Cologne. In the days of the Weimar Republic he was a high official in the Berlin police department. Under the Hitler regime, he was interned for years in a concentration camp. He spent the last four years in hiding in the outskirts of Cologne. Now, because of his experience and because he was one of the few local residents whom the AMG could trust, they appointed him chief of police for Cologne. These are his words: "The Jews who migrate to America and England will return to claim their property, but when they see Germany they'll leave again. If it were possible to leave, I'd go myself, on foot, if I could."

▼

THE AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR Judaism was recently praised by an Arabic broadcast from Berlin for its opposition to the Jewish Brigade. That is almost as good as being praised by the Nazi Minister of Propaganda Goebbels himself. We wonder how the American Council for Judaism will return the compliment. Will it praise the Arabs for having so long opposed the use of Arab forces against the Axis?

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ON SATURDAY EVENING, MAY 5th and Sunday afternoon and evening, May 6th, a conference on Palestine will be held at The Plaza in New York City, which will be different. It will be different in that it will not deal with the political situation, the refugee problem or Zionist ideology, but will present a comprehensive picture of the present economy of Palestine and a survey of prospects for the future. An investment in a Palestinian enterprise is one of those *mitzvot* of which it may well be said that "one partakes of their fruits in this world, while the stock remains to one in the world to come." In more modern parlance, it is one which offers material returns while giving one the added satisfaction of having participated in a constructive enterprise for the public good. We hope the conference, which has been called by the Palestine Economic Bureau of the Z.O.A., will be well attended and will achieve its purpose.

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SOME TIME AGO WE COMMENTED editorially on a joint statement on world peace issued by Protestant Catholic and Jewish leaders. We expressed the hope that joint efforts would be made to

(Continued on Page 16)

The Joseph Books*

By GRACE GOLDIN

WITH the recent publication of *Joseph the Provider,* Thomas Mann's Joseph series has been at last completed. The five volumes as they stand are a very great work, a tremendous undertaking. As the author says, both he and his audience—the first generation of his audience at any rate—have grown older as they pursued together the life of Jacob from a little before his birth (his struggle with Esau in Rebecca's womb) to a little after his death (his burial with full Egyptian honors). For despite the title of these books, the life of Jacob not of Joseph determines their time-span—according to Mann's reckoning, one hundred and six years. The patriatch's personality is even more vividly reconstructed than that of the Vice-Pharoah his son: while the son was "a very good specimen of a descendant, volatile, witty, difficult and interesting," Jacob was the ancestor whose spiritual stature Joseph never equalled. Of course Joseph's career was outwardly the more spectacular. Not once but twice he was cast down into the pit, and his amazing rise therefrom is a real success story. But Joseph took good and bad fortune in a more matter-of-fact way than did his father. God had created the soul of Jacob "large and tender, and taught it how to reveal itself with overwhelming power." Jacob dramatized his life, every minute of it; when things were dull he brooded majestically over his tales. Speaking comparatively, the favorite son Joseph reflected but diffusely his father's "capacity for God-thoughts" and God's strong blessing upon Israel. Jacob's life was not merely a successful one — it was a creative entity. And the books Mann has written about Jacob are not simply successful either but a creative whole.

Mann's Creativity

In four ways Mann's creativity proves itself: in his characterization, in his reconstruction through archaeology of a distant time (whether correctly or not I do not know, but this is quite irrelevant), in the meditative quality of his story, and in its sweeping climaxes. There are, one would say, three characters who develop under one's eyes, move, change, and grow: Jacob, Joseph, and more briefly Eni, Potiphar's unfortunate wife. The other personalities involved, and they are many, come forth vividly, but they play supporting roles that never vary; indeed, it would be out of place to represent these characters with more than one costume and one gesture. Nevertheless, we get to know well the clever, ruthless Rebecca; the pathetic and wilfully blind Isaac, who lent himself to deception over the birthright; the good-humored brute Esau; Eliezer the perennial faithful servant; Jacob's two wives, Leah the unloved fruitful one, and the beautiful, eager, yet so long barren Rachel. Then come the brothers, each one standing under his particular characteristic like so many signs of the Zodiac: Reuben, the upright tower, fond enough to admit Joseph's superiority even when that worked heavily to his own disadvantage; Judah, tormented by the goddess of love yet, despite his shamefacedness, not disqualified for the inheritance; the little man Benjamin, affectionate, eager as his mother was, yet always the youngest, always "little" Benjamin; Naphtali

* This monumental work by Thomas Mann merits more consideration than could be given to it in the ordinary book review. We therefore publish two articles in this issue which deal with it from somewhat different angles, this one by Grace Goldin and the other by Bertha Badt-Strauss, which commences on page 12.

the runner; and Simeon and Levi who inherited less from Jacob than from Uncle Esau. With these and others we become familiar as we cross and recross the two thousand pages of Mann's tale. We journey back and forth from Canaan to Egypt; we stand before an effeminate Pharaoh and his decisive mother; and the crafty Laban, the resolute Tamar, will never be just names any more.

Mann's Method and That of the Midrash

Whether all these people are what Jewish tradition would have them be is another matter, with which the story does not concern itself—it has its own life, integrity and sweep; and if Mann chooses to make of religious symbols rude and all but pagan characters, he has a perfect artistic right to do so. He has created a magnificent novel largely from Jewish elements—twisting and transforming these to fit his purposes, which are not at all those of the rabbinic commentators on Biblical legend. It goes to show what can be done with Jewish tradition—how varied is the effect even when one uses it only as a tool.

Fundamentally, the difference between the Joseph story as Mann has executed it, and the Joseph story as it is found in Midrashic legend, would seem to be this: in the Midrash detail is abundant (and Thomas Mann has generously helped himself) but the Midrash uses detail to glorify the patriarchs, to show of what heroic stuff they were made; or to prove that, when they met reverses, they deserved their punishment; or, above all, to act as apologetic for Israel in all ages and a sanctification of its God. Mann is of course not primarily a theologian, though he amuses himself with theological and metaphysical speculation. He is a story-teller, who uses the detail that falls to his hand for the furtherance of plot, the development of character, and the greater glory of his narrative. To this end he has selected and pruned his rich, indiscriminate, often contradictory sources, selecting just such episodes as will fall into a logical, dramatic pattern. The wilder elements — the Paul Bunyan extravagances — he has cast aside. He talks a lot about angels, and of course there was the angel who fought with Jacob and the angels on the ladder (I'll take the Biblical version of that ladder, by the way)— but when it comes to *dramatis personae,* Thomas Mann presents us with only one angel. In the Midrash he was Gabriel, in Young Joseph he is just some annoying and annoyed anonymous messenger.

Where gaps occur in the narrative, Mann has filled them in, as a story teller must, with the explanation that this is what absolutely must have happened though no source tells us so. He has done superb justice to the climaxes wherever indicated; the high points of his reconstruction occur precisely at the most gripping moments of the Biblical narrative. Certain scenes he has unforgettably brought before the eyes. After all, as he says, "anybody can know the story. To have been there is the thing." How Jacob stole the blessing from his brother Esau; Jacob's marriage, one dark windy night, to the wrong bride; the binding of Joseph when his desperate brothers threw him into the well; the whole second volume of *Joseph in Egypt* that, with mounting tension, gives the affair with Potiphar's wife (she is entirely Mann's creation); Joseph's first meeting with Pharaoh; the story of Tamar; the audiences with the brothers in Egypt before Joseph finally revealed to them who he was — these scenes will live quite independently of the Bible. They are completely realized. Mann rises to meet each one like a great ship rising to meet an equally great wave; he navigates them magnificently. In my

opinion these scenes make the books great.

Yet in the volumes as a whole the meditative, slow-moving interstices have their purpose, too. We do not live in great moments, nor were the lives of Jacob and Joseph composed of such. Both men spent long years waiting. Thomas Mann, whose ultimate hero is often Time, knows how to give a sense of time's texture — ordinary, waiting, undramatic days and years, filled with routine, expectation, memory, musing, observation, superstition, religious thinking and whatever else makes for life. But those qualities alone do not wholly define either a book or a life, both of which must circle round certain passionate scenes; for as our author says, "Very much happens in the world; and as we cannot wish that it might rather have peacefully remained unhappened, we may not curse the passions which are its instrument; for without passion and guilt nothing could proceed."

The Modern Note in the Joseph Books

The Joseph books are not religious books — the most modern thing about them is their secular tone of voice. The religious preoccupation of Mann's two main characters are but one phase of their life as a whole, in no sense whatever their *raison d'etre*. Joseph's religiosity is partly an instinct for reward and punishment (he is an eminently practical man), partly a sense of fate and predestination (conceived as often in terms of some pagan deity, Tammuz for instance, as in terms of God.) Mann's Jacob had a talent for religion; he was gifted to see God, and he talked incessantly about Him. That was his business in life. But such a gentleman could never have fathered or forefathered Judaism. Perhaps the Jacob of the Bible was closer to Thomas Mann's Jacob than to the rabbinic notion of him; if so, then the rabbis were justified in revising his character till every phrase and every letter of it pointed to God.

And many of Mann's themes are not primarily religious ones but rise straight out of folklore. We hear much of the effectiveness of blessing, even when wrongly bestowed; Jacob who stole his blessing found water by it where there was no water, cast fruitfulness even upon the crusty Laban, and enriched his own self with worldly goods past all telling. Joseph received the blessing from him (it is somehow allied to craftiness) and he fed all Egypt. But Joseph did not also receive that magic thing, the birthright, so his was only a partial blessing and it stopped with him. Why was he denied the birthright? His father longed to bestow it on him. Jacob had transferred to the favoured son all his arrogant love for Rachel, the favorite wife. But though the heart is arbitrary and stubborn in its election, a perverse kind of justice rules the heart. The unloved wife and her son Judah inherited; in the end Jacob was forced to submit himself to the state of things. Joseph was one forever set apart and separate, dedicated to his task as Egypt's provider, but so far as his own tradition was concerned, both lost and sterile.

So legendary and human motives interweave, and numerous subtle causes are found for each event in this one hundred and six year life of Jacob. Of every motif Thomas Mann's two protagonists were quite aware. Biblical personalities possessed no such self-consciousness; they were conscious of God and self-dedicated; while Midrashic characters were wholly bent on their appointed rounds as personifications. But the Jacob and Joseph of Thomas Mann acted most of the time as though they were living in a play— indeed, in the last volume, Joseph meticulously set the scene for his great meeting

with his brothers, with the thought that the tale of it would often be retold and he must make all as seemly as possible. This self-consciousness is modern, and at the same time typical of legend. For a man who will become a legend in the popular mind often feels that he plays, while yet alive, a leading part in some predestined scene, a role never tried before but destined to become popular—a role that he creates but whose end is inevitable.

Thomas Mann and the Midrash

By BERTHA BADT-STRAUSS

"TURN the Holy Scriptures hither and thither, turn them inside out . . . for everything is contained therein!" — This used to be the guiding principle of our ancient Sages as quoted in the familiar Mishnah-tractate Abot ("Chapters of the Fathers"). The sentence still brings with it some flavor of long and somewhat drowsy summer Sabbath afternoons when they used to recite it in the synagogues in the afternoon service. But it would seem to this writer that, from now on, nobody among us would ever remember this principle of the ancient Midrash without at the same time recalling Thomas Mann and his magnificent tetralogy, "Joseph and his Brothers." His latest and final volume, "Joseph the Provider," was published not long ago, and, even more than its elder brothers, this book seems to have been animated by the very same method of retelling the unforgetable stories of the Bible that the ancient "Masters of the Midrash" had employed.

Mann's Midrashic Method

I do not know whether Thomas Mann ever heard of this age-old principle of the ancient commentators. He might easily have done so. For whoever was fortunate enough to come to Munich while it still *was* Munich, city of artists and culture, before the Nazi dictators chose to mar it, knew that this great and painstaking writer, like Martin Luther when he was bent on translating the Bible, loved to consult Jewish scholars, both rabbis and laymen. It was in those years that, after rereading the family Bible, Mann decided one night to retell "one of its stories." It was in those years also that he discovered for himself the way to do so—the way of the Midrash.

What exactly is the Midrash? The Hebrew word *darosh,* from which it is derived, gives us the clue; it means "to seek," also "to explain." Well has the Midrash been called a "creative commentary" on the Bible. For the ancient commentator found himself in the very same position as the modern literary artist in relation to his theme. He had to retell a "story which everybody knew by heart"; but he had also to add something new to the old material. It is interesting to note that Thomas Mann saw himself clearly in the same predicament and tells us about it in one of his delightful introductions to the different chapters of his book. Of course, he might have found some comfort in recalling the identical situation of the classical poet in ancient Greece. Everybody knew by heart all the incidents in the story of the siege of Troy and the homecoming of King Agamemnon; yet the poet retold them. Some scholars seem to see in this very absence

of the surprise element another and a higher sphere of influence on the mind of the audience. Be that as it may, this is the situation in which both the Greek poet and the ancient masters of the Midrash as well as the modern writer and re-teller of Biblical tales found themselves. How did they meet the situation, the dramatic poet, the commentator and the modern writer?

There are two ways which the creative writer can follow in retelling a story which has already been told and still lives in every reader's mind. Both the modern author and the ancient masters of the Midrash discovered the same methods. They had either to interpret the reticent and word-sparing Biblical text again and again, discovering hidden meanings in its slightest word, or else to elaborate the text by adding to it the "in between," telling what happened before and after the Biblical story.

Both ways were open to Thomas Mann. At times he seems to have pondered the problem: Is it worthwhile to tell a story which everybody knows by heart? True, there cannot be any surprise effects in such a narration. Nevertheless, everybody would like to know what was behind it all, how everything about the heroes looked and what went on in their hearts. After all the archaeological discoveries of recent decades, there is much that a present-day writer can tell about Egypt, and Thomas Mann takes full advantage of all these new illustrations of the old text. Moreover this is one of the few cases where Mann ventured to add some newly established knowledge of ancient history. He saw in the Pharaoh of Genesis, the so-called "good Paraoh," who closely followed the advice given to him by his treasurer Joseph, none other than the religious reformer, Pharaoh Amenhotep, the husband of lovely Nephritete, whose dark mysterious beauty has become familiar to many of us. So he felt at liberty to add another portrait to his Biblical gallery; and the masters of the Midrash would very likely have approved.

The Tamar Episode

In presenting another of his characters, Thomas Mann, with a sort of ironical pride, mentions the fact that even zealous readers of the Bible would most likely have forgotten all about this particular heroine. The heroine is Tamar, a favorite of Mann to whom he has just dedicated a slim little volume. "Who is Tamar?" a friend asked the other day; and was aghast to hear that all about Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, was right there in the Bible: how her two husbands, the sons of Judah, died an early death without leaving her the son she desired; how Tamar tried to get Judah himself as father of her son and was almost put to death as a harlot; and how Judah, the "Lion," finally had to confess that Tamar had been right. "She is more justified than I." The story of Judah and Tamar has often been treated in medieval plays; but never before as convincingly as Thomas Mann treated it. His Tamar had had the privilege of having been a pupil of old Father Jacob and hearing from him all the venerable tales about God's blessing to Israel. So she decided to get herself, by all means, into this picture, by means, twice denied her, of becoming a "mother in Israel." "Beautiful after an austere and forbidding fashion," she alone is, at long last, allowed to stand in the proximity of the Patriarch, a gaunt tall matron in the midst of her two stately sons. Nobody who reads this chapter will ever forget Tamar—and the symbolical dignity the author gave her. With a twinkle in his eye, Thomas Mann might well postpone his censure of ignorant Bible students, "as the common ignorance adds to the importance of the story teller's task."

The Episode of Pharaoh's Butler and His Baker

There is another item which—as the average reader of the Bible might feel—represents an innovation introduced into the stories of Genesis, an element of serene humor rising, at times, to comedy. Now this element of humor is, as everybody knows, by no means wanting in Biblical stories. The biography of Samson, the Judge and the fool, furnishes one of the most striking examples. But few readers have detected humor in Genesis. Hereafter, nobody will overlook it, after having made the acquaintance of the "two fine gentlemen," the Chief-Baker and the Chief-Butler, jail companions of Joseph the Dreamer, who illustrate the quality of the average man's gratitude and his inclination to forget unpleasant memories.

The Episode of Joseph's Reunion With His Brothers

In this episode, there was the colorful background of Egyptian temples and customs waiting for any student of modern archaeology to add to the story for purposes of illustration. But in another of these delicious short stories, the pilgrimage of the brothers to Egypt, Mann himself does not seem to do anything more than to re-read the Biblical text and interpret it as did the authors of the Midrash, to whom every little hook and accent mark became important. Thus Mann sees what even some of the old commentators, more or less willingly, overlooked: that the men who came to Egypt were no more the same brothers who used to quarrel with Joseph. Even their baby brother Benoni - Benjamin, even he, had long since outgrown his babyhood and become a man and a father. The famous illustrations in the well-known Haggadah of Serajevo show Benjamin as a tender child in the midst of his stately brothers. Thomas Mann, however, takes a certain pride in showing that the youngest brother is a man now who silently resents the incessant loving care of his old father, whose pet he has been since Joseph's disappearance. By stressing this "march of time," the author well knows how to blend an element of comedy with this thrilling story of the "lost who is found." There is a delightful story of Benjamin and the (still unknown) Egyptian brother at table conversing and telling each other the pranks of their children. Joseph himself smiles at the fact that "the youngest son now has a youngest son of his own."

We confess that we were a bit surprised to find even the minutest details of this conversation in the Midrashim (see Ginzberg, "Legends of the Jews," Vol. II., p. 97). Even the puns, playing on the names of Benjamin's sons, are to be found there. It would seem a pity that Mann did not go a step further and take over the secret meaning of their names, which Father Benjamin is supposed to have given them in memory of his brother whom he thught lost and dead. But one can conjecture why Mann suppressed this item; he did not want to ascribe any more nostalgia to the brothers in this scene in which their feelings are described as a delicate mixture of love and fear for the Egyptian nobleman who has not yet been revealed to them as their brother Joseph.

Incidentally, this very same element of humor, which Thomas Mann seems to have added to the Genesis chapters, is no stranger to the Midrashim. There, for instance, brother Simon, who was kept back in Egypt as hostage and put in jail, is discovered looking "like a leather bottle, so fat and rotund had he grown during his sojourn in Egypt" (*Bereshit Rabbah,* 92, 4). This evidently serves as a sort of anti-climax to the fears and anxieties of his brothers.

The Episode of Serah, the Daughter of Asher

Another lovely episode in Thomas Mann's Joseph reveals to the reader how much the author discovered in this long-hidden source, and how skillfully he developed it. That is the story of Serah, Asher's daughter. Just as in the Tamar story, Thomas Mann might have found most of its readers in complete ignorance concerning Serah. Who was she and what did she do in those exciting days when the lost son was found? Again the author might value such ignorance as rendering the task of the story teller all the more important. But in this case he need not have done so. A close comparison of the legend and of the delicious miniature which the poet developed from the old story reveals to the reader all the possibilities of this new way of retelling the old story, this "super-midrash" as Ludwig Lewisohn calls it.

Let us look at the Midrash first as rendered in that inexhaustible book of Ginzberg's "The Legends of the Jews," (Vol. II., p. 115). The brothers coming home to their father with the glad tidings that the lost son was found are afraid that Jacob might be startled by this sudden news and might not believe it. Close to their habitation they catch sight of Serah, the daughter of Asher, a very beautiful maiden and skilled in playing on the harp. "They summoned her unto them and gave her a harp and bade her play before Jacob and sing that which they should tell her. She sat down before Jacob and with an agreeable melody, she sang the following words, accompanying herself upon the harp: 'Joseph, my uncle, liveth, he ruleth over the whole of Egypt, he is not dead!' "

And now let us see what kind of story the modern author developed from out of this simple report ("Telling the News," p. 473 ff). Now we see the brothers coming home in spring over the rough, stony slope of the Palestine plain, strewn thickly with spring flowers, as if they were making their way through the Emek Yisreel of today. We see the little girl sitting on a rock, herself like a flower, "a little maid alone under the wide sky, in red smock with daisies in her hair and the zither in her arms." And then she comes running barefoot through blossoms and rubble till the silver rings on wrists and ankles jingle and the yellow and white wreath bobs up and down on her head. . . . We shall not soon forget this "proper little maid, no longer a child and not yet a maiden, at most twelve years old." And the artless verses she sings to her grandfather, to tell him the gladdening news — well, they certainly are no high-flowing poetry (for which a rather sloppy translation may be partly to blame) but, in his inimitable way, Mann manages to catch the sound of this little "music-lips" who, half unconsciously, rhymes whenever she speaks and begins to sing even before she knows what it is all about.

This is one of the most unforgettable scenes of the whole overrich book—and, incidentally, one which suffers most in translation — for it shows how the modern author took the plain Midrashic story, and changed it into something wonderful and strange. Or rather, he does not change it; he views the tale as a living being, and, like God in the Creation story, he breathes new life into it . . . and it lives anew. Here the old Midrash and the new writer achieve a perfect union; and the reader is as blessed as are the brothers and their aged father Jacob, when Serah of the song-lips sits on the mat and sings:

"Read it in his laughing features
All was but a God-like jest
And in late-believing raptures
Take him to thy father-breast!"

The Rescue of Mann's Manuscript

In her interesting chronicle, Thomas Mann's daughter, Erica Mann, tells us the story of how she risked her own life in order to save the manuscript of her father's Joseph book from the claws of the barbarians. Thomas Mann had, all unwittingly, left the manuscript in his Munich home before going on a short vacation, as he supposed, to Switzerland. In the meantime hell broke loose in Germany; and now the courageous girl came back from Switzerland, putting on dark glasses and an old raincoat, a very inefficient masquerade as she felt later on, and grabbed the manuscript in the empty house, which was invaded by the Nazis soon after her escape. There is an old Jewish saying which Erica Mann certainly never knew but which may well be applied to her action on that ghastly night in her father's house, alone with the Joseph manuscript in the midst of a city full of shouting hordes. "There are people," so it runs, "who gain their share of the world to come by a single deed." It would seem to many among us that Erica Mann won her share of the world to come, by saving the Joseph manuscript from the barbarians. For, according to the opinion of many a reader, "Joseph and His Brothers" is the work by which this period will be known in the history of world literature.

REALITIES AND VALUES

(Continued from Page 8)

implement the "Pattern of Peace" by calling attention to the application of its principles to pending international issues. We are happy to report progress in that direction. A study made by representatives of the Federal Council of Churches, The National Catholic Welfare Conference and the Synagogue Council of America sets forth the following nine recommendations for improving the United Nations Charter: (1) a preamble to affirm subjection of all states to the moral law, (2) eventual universal membership, (3) codification and development of international law, (4) more explicit provision for revising treaties and other agreements, (5) larger participation of lesser powers in policy-shaping, (6) clearer procedures for mutual disarmament, (7) denying to any nation power to veto judgment in a dispute covered by international law, (8) formulation of an international bill of rights and establishment of implementing agencies, and (9) a Trusteeship Commission for dependent peoples.

▼

NOT SO LONG AGO, YOUNG American Jews who wanted to get a thorough Jewish education, would be sent to Europe for a number of years to study at one of the yeshivahs or seminaries. Today the reverse is true. The United States is the place where students go to study. A few weeks ago, the B'nai B'rith of Mexico City sent a former secretary of its lodge to the Jewish Theological Seminary, to study for the rabbinate. He will be the first American-trained rabbi in Mexico. Once again we are reminded of the serious responsibility which American Jewry is called on to assume for the spiritual and cultural life of other communities. Thus far, the leadership has fallen on American shoulders by default. Other communities either are destroyed or are too new and young. Let us hope American Jewry will prove worthy of its new role, and retain it on merit.

Lidice, Warsaw, Lublin, Robombs

By LILLIAN REZNICK OTT

"It simply can't be. It all seems like a horrid dream."
—From a soldier's letter.

Oh,
This is but a dream,
A hellish nightmare
That shall be done
When night is gone.
It can't be real,
These things I feel. . . .
It's just a dream,
Yes, just a dream.
A stupor-induced reverie
That unfolds for me
This morbid sight,
Of cities burning
In the night,
Of white-capped waves
Upon whose crest
The breath of the dying
Comes to rest. . . .
These are but waves,
Just wind-tossed waves
Which only the fancy
Has fashioned into graves,
Fancies born out of a dream,
Yes, a dream.

It can't be so,
These things, I know,
It's just the wind
Over regions bleak
Howling at the night
Not a shriek of human pain.
It's not the cry
Of men who die. . . .
No, no!
Just a dream.

It can't be true,
These things I view,
Of mangled bodies
Piled up high,
Of starving hordes
Who pass them by
Without a tear—
Of halls whose very air
Was fraught
With the jubilant freedom
For which men fought
To praise the Lord,
Each in his way,
And which now
In the ruins of fires lay.
No, these are all
But shadows stark
Assuming forms
Grotesque in the dark,
Yes, shadows emerging
From out of the dark
In just a dream.

Oh,
This is but a dream,
An eerie fantasy
That shall be gone
When wakes the dawn.
It can't be so
This gruesome woe,
These marching feet
Made strong and fleet
By fire and hate.
These spewing guns. . . .
This blood that runs. . . .
These figures gaunt
Whose gouged eyes haunt. . . .
Ah, these are but spectres
Awful and grim. . . .
Oh, God!
This can't be so—
It must be a dream,
Yes, only a dream.

Music Notes

By JUDITH K. EISENSTEIN

THIS column has been sadly remiss in recent months in reporting the affairs of Jewish music. The rare experience of hearing an exquisite performance compels us to break the long silence. We do so partly in the hope that the experience may some day be shared by a great many more people than there were present at last week's concert of the Hebrew Arts Committee, and partly to press a point which has been this writer's hard-ridden hobby for a long time.

The Hebrew Arts Committee, which has recently come under the aegis of the Zionist Organization of America, has been feeling its way for several years, trying to do a double job of educating young people in the performance of music, dance and drama in the Jewish idiom, and in providing the public with art experiences that might enrich their lives as Jews. The result hitherto has been an inadequate accomplishment of either aim. Young people, being forced into performance long before they were ripe for it, were not being truly educated. And the public, being given less than good student performances, were not having art experiences in any sense of the word.

Last week's concert seemed to indicate a new departure on the part of the committee. While the instrumental section of the concert—a valiant effort on the part of Mr. Siegfried Landau — still suffered from the old confusion, the choral section consisted of a program by a professional group of choral singers, an unusually sensitive instrument in the hands of a master, Chemjo Vinaver. The twelve members of this group were sufficiently mature and sufficiently skilled musically to be able and willing to serve as a means to an end, the end being music for its own sake, and for the delectation of an audience. Mr. Vinaver, who knows, as do few choral directors, Jewish or otherwise, how to pull the stops, touch the keys, and wield the pedals of this instrument, gave us music which was profoundly moving, and profoundly Jewish. Going straight to the sources of our musical heritage, undeterred by any secularist prejudices, he gave us music of the synagogue: the blessed peace of the Sabbath, in *Veshomru,* the awe and sense of dependence on a greater force than ourselves, of the Day of Atonement, in *Omnam Ken.* No sweet sentimentality was here; nor, on the other hand, any striving for effect or originality. Here was the purest refinement of religious emotion.

The Talmudic Rhapsody was probably the most telling illustration of the power of the beautiful. The text of the Rhapsody is a perfectly prosaic ritual discussion. It could have been almost any series of meaningless syllables. But the illumination of the music, which was the elaboration of the traditional students' chant, reflected precisely the role of Talmud study in the life of the Yeshivah student. Far beyond and above its strict interpretation, it was the poetry, the dream essence of his life. Upon the dull and practical words he hung the web of his af-

fective existence, and it assumed the form of rhapsody. It is this emotional existence which was re-created for us in the singing of the choral ensemble; re-created so vividly that the audience, whether it had or had not known that existence before, felt it, and understood it and sympathized with it at that moment.

The group also sang music from our second great source of spiritual and artistic inspiration. It dealt with songs of Palestine with a charm and delicacy that is practically unknown in the whole field of Jewish music. Again, it gave the audience its truest taste of how their own lives could be directly touched by the fact of a Jewish Palestine, by its warmth and gayety, and vigor, and quiet joy, carried through music.

We sincerely hope that this group, under its artist conductor, will continue to sing and will be heard in a much wider community, not only in New York, but in the country at large. In general, we hope that the Hebrew Arts Committee will see its way toward defining its own aims, and will adopt a policy of educating the Jewish masses, first, by establishing high professional standards of art expression in all its fields. This is a basic prerequisite to the eventual building up of a corps of participating amateurs, if you will. But the word amateur must be restored to its original significance. It means talented *lover* of art. It means a person who has ability and devotion, and willingness to sacrifice and to study and to undergo the terrific discipline of art, without the reward of either remuneration or applause. Such amateurs will not be attracted into the Jewish field until they sense the reality of a Jewish art.

Let us remember that there are volunteer choruses all over the country, in sisterhoods, centers and YMHA's. There are orchestras, and dramatic groups galore. But our talented boys and girls avoid them like the plague, and flee to outside organizations and institutions which are known for their excellence. The Hebrew Arts Committee will be able to gather to itself the students of the great conservatories, the pupils of America's best dancers, and the most serious of our young actors, when its professional chorus, orchestra, dance group and experimental theatre have established their reputations for excellence. And if these young people find that they have to learn Hebrew in order to participate in such activities, they will do it. Plenty of them learn Italian, French and German, and heaven knows what other languages, for the sake of an art. They will be willing to learn Hebrew too—for a Hebrew Art.

Book Notes

AMERICANISM THROUGH BRITISH EYES

THE AMERICAN CHARACTER, by D. W. Brogan. Alfred A. Knopf, 1944.

THE picture that is conjured up by a book entitled *The American Character* from the pen of a distinguished British scholar, is the image of Bryce, schooled and lettered historian of American manners and institutions. Or perhaps one recalls Siegfried, another distinguished foreigner who presented us with a critical evaluation of our social, political, economic and intellectual life in the late nineteen twenties.

This book is neither political economy nor sociology nor professional social psychology. It is a series of swiftly moving impressions by a brilliant British journalist. It is true that Brogan occupies the chair of Political Science at Cambridge University, but here, at least, he breaks with academic tradition and becomes the facile observer. Brogan fuses his impressions with the spark of American idiom and the tang of American slang. He finds ample justification for a sedulous aping of Hollywood's or *Hellsapoppin's* school of journalism in that "slang is one of the great sources of language. French is but improved Latin slang." And slang has not only modeled the form of the American language; it is a mirror of American character. It is an estimable tool for understanding the psychology of mass America.

Brogan knows the common garden variety American with an intuitive and expansive understanding. Four factors have been significant in the making of his "American Character" — geography, climate, woman and the Federal Constitution. A million square miles of "forest primeval" faced the founding fathers when they landed on these shores. The forest had to be converted into fields. America had to be hewn before it could be lived in. And that making took a century of extraordinary energy. "It bred the temper of the pioneer, the temper of the gambler, the temper of the booster, the temper of the discounter of the future who is, to some extent, bound to be a disparager of the past." And this bravado faith in the unknown, this bold belief in our resources, strikes Brogan as conspicuously characteristic of American life.

Americans are dwellers in a country of climatic extremes. Savage floods in the Mississippi have produced annual disasters. Sudden frosts in the paradise of Florida have destroyed carefully nurtured crops. Earthquakes in California, hurricanes and tornadoes in the midwest, peaks of heat and cold in the North Atlantic and Northwest compelled Americans in the century past to make resourceful adjustments. But with the advent of science and technology have come evidences that America is "licking" the bogey of climate.

And with the advent of science came the rise of the American woman. The American woman was the chief gainer from the mechanical progress of the nineteenth century. She became heiress to the can opener and the sewing machine, "to an effective system of heating, to good oil lamps, to running water, to anesthe-

tics . . . to the appearance of an economic margin to spend on what had been luxuries — and of time in which to spend this margin." And how did the American woman use her time? She became the great civilizing influence on American life. She became a social reformer and a solicitous mother. She became worried about birth control, suffrage, prohibition, the abolition of the brothel and Junior's teeth and music. It became the ambition of the American woman and later of the American man to provide a world in which life could be better and easier for their children. What is "better" by American standards of values is evinced in the startling rise of cities and urban achievements — the architectural spires of New York and Chicago, the thousands of red-bricked schools that line our lesser cities, the broad highways that connect them, the dams, the canals, the parks, the hospitals, the boosting real estate developments and the competing civic prides. The community life that flaunts these urban comforts is governed by common mores, common social standards, common tolerances and common prejudices.

But the great miracle of America, says Brogen, is that it has built a common political and national faith. Our schools have accelerated this unifying process in the "religious observance" of flag worship and oath-taking. To an Englishman the American flag "is more than mere symbol . . . it is the regimental color of a regiment in which all Americans are enrolled." Americans are a people that live by symbols and legends. Americans have placed a halo of legendary worship about the Constitution. If we would understand the unique achievement which is America, the creation of "a free government over a continental area without making a sacrifice of adequate efficiency for liberty," then we must understand the "cult of the Constitution," says Brogan. America has endowed the Constitution with a cure-all quality. It treasures the Constitution as the source of its liberties. The historical experience of two major wars — the War of the Revolution and the Civil War — are fused by Americans in fact and legend with the sanctity of the Constitution and this national experience lives in American life in an aura of heroic speeches and fighting slogans.

It would be well if this common political faith had made us an integrated society. But America has undigested minorities. It has not yet learned the ways of cultural or social pluralism. It has not yet learned the great lesson of unity which is unity in diversity. Thirteen million Negroes and four million Jews are still, for many Americans, beyond the pale of its vaunted local community life. Brogan has a wise word of warning on anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is not the Jews' problem at all. It is America's problem. There is danger "to American social and political life inherent in the exploitation of anti-Semitism by crypo-fascist organizations as well as by bigoted devotees of peace and international brotherhood. . . . When American frontier intolerance gets its head, it does not require much rational justification."

Brogan delights in American whimsies and American folk lore — "its good food ruined in that enemy to the pursuit of happiness, the frying pan," its passion for ice in water, in coffee, in alcoholic concoctions. He "gets a kick" out of "Helen Hokinson's plump middle-aged girls." He notes the paradox of our horror for war but our pleasure in its trappings. He notes our fluctuating fashions in art and literature which fled a Left Bank devotion to decadent European antiquities only to embrace mediocre American primitives. And youth, he observes,

has its fashions in cynicism just as it has vogues in haircuts and shoes.

He relishes the recounting of our national foibles and our social myths — the supernaturalist linking of God with prosperity, our evangelical faith in the powers of individual conversion and the political equivalent of this faith in Wilsonian evangelism, the love of absolutes in ethics, which reduces the world to heroes and villains. He respects our stubborn rebuff to states of permanent pessimism. "With the first turn of the tide in 1933, the revolutionary temper of the American people turned out to have been a case of wrong diagnosis. It was only depression measles." There are acute insights on American patience, on American perseverance, on our emotional responses, on regionalism and provincial patriotism, on the conflict of traditions between Catholicism and Protestantism. There are critical comments on American politics; there is acknowledgment of America's problem child — the South; and there is a pungent analysis of our objection to secret covenants. The America public "has a village horror of the successful privacy of its neighbors. This public cannot see why Mr. Roosevelt should want to keep his political intentions quiet any more than Mr. Tommy Manville keeps his matrimonial intentions quiet."

Brogan crowds his thin volume with sharp, shrewd, scintillating observations on the American amalgam, but this reader must record that the book falls far short of deserving its comprehensive title "The American Character." It is a one-dimensional portrait. The author has caught the glint of American life but he has ignored its depths and its shadows.

Even a sketchy observer of contemporary America must note the symptoms of a deep-seated malady which colors and distorts American behavior. America lives in the fear of a contracting post-war economy. Owning groups and laboring groups are battling each other for the maintenance of intrenched domestic positions. And both groups fear the competition from Europe of foreign manpower and alien "radicalisms." There are forebodings of conflict and challenge to our native resources greater than we Americans have ever faced.

We see America in motion in this book but we see it move by surface reflexes. A sensitive observer of American life cannot fail to note the strain of moral earnestness that is so articulate in the utterances of a Henry Wallace or a Dorothy Thompson. He would pause to evaluate the indigenous and enlightened internationalism of the late Wendell Willkie. He would be moved by the fervent dedication to human freedom in the lyric voice of Russell Davenport. These may not be the current heritage of garden variety Americans, but they are manifests of America's nobler self. They are facets of American character. And if Americans are to don the cloak of international leadership with which Brogan invests them in his closing lines, Americans must have spiritual goals to stir their ebullient energies. And even capsule characterizations of Americans must reveal that man cannot live by bread alone — even pre-sliced bread.

LEOPOLD J. SNEIDER

CORRESPONDENCE

Resenting Our Criticism of the American Jewish Committee

Sir:

It is disappointing, yes, downright shocking to find a deliberate misstatement of the position of an organization that happens to disagree with certain of your opinions.

I refer to the item in "Realities and Values" in your April 6 issue, from which I quote: "The American Jewish Committee has always opposed the World Congress on the ground that American Jews have only religious interests in common with the Jewries of other nations."

How can you permit such smug disparagement of the many accomplishments of the American Jewish Committee in the field of world-wide Jewish interests over the years? Ignorance of the facts is as inexcusable, in this instance, as malice!

The pretense of "wonder" whether the proposed meeting with the Anglo-Jewish Association is for discussion of subjects "purely ritualistic, ecclesiastic and theological" is transparent and, I must say, rather cheap.

Does your grievance against the American Jewish Committee, because they refuse to yield on a point of honest conviction as to the welfare of our people, justify so flagrant a violation of the Commandment not to bear false witness against one's neighbor?

In the name of honesty and fair-play, expunge that falsehood!

LEO BRECHER

We do not disparge the achievements of the American Jewish Committee; we criticize its ideology. The freedom of conscience of the American Jewish Committee was not at issue. The American Jewish Committee may hold what convictions it will. But it may not sabotage the democratically expressed will of American Jewry on issues involving the status of Jewry as a whole.

—EDITORS

Holds Judaism Superior

Sirs:

I have just received a copy of the RECONSTRUCTIONIST for the first time since I am overseas. For this I am grateful. To write a letter discussing one of the points raised in this issue is to bring me still closer to normalcy. To these pleasures I shall add the luxury of actually mailing this discussion.

In your column, "Realities and Values" (Vol. X, No. 71), you quote a controversy over the sale of a Jewish synagogue to a Negro Baptist congregation which was aired in Common Pleas Court in Cincinnati. You make this controversy a case in point to sustain your opposition to the idea of the Chosen People as used in our Prayer Book. The point is based on Rabbi Eliezer Silver's opinion that the conversion of a Jewish synagogue into a church is contrary to Jewish law. You say that "the contention of Rabbi Silver is based on the assumption that Jewish religion is superior and that it is therefore a profanation to permit a building dedicated to Jewish worship to be used later for any religious worship."

I find the second part of your interpretation correct. I think that the rabbi's objection is based on the contention that the conversion of a synagogue into a church is a profanation. Like you, I find this contention obnoxious. I think it wrong to object to the conversion of a synagogue into a church or vice versa if the occasion warrants. This part of your interpretation is, however, not relevant to the subject of the Chosen People idea.

The relevant part is your statement that the rabbi's contention is based upon the assumption that Jewish Religion is *superior*. That does not seem to me to be correct. The contention of Rabbi Silver seems to me to be based rather on the assumption that Jewish religion is the *only divine truth*. Though both assumptions may lead to the idea of the Chosen People, there is a great difference between them. Mere superiority would not brand conversion as profanation. It is the belief that

the synagogue houses the *only divine truth* that must lead to that conclusion.

I believe that Jewish religion is (and was) better than all other religions. I say that without pride because I had nothing to do with its superiority, because I merely feel myself the beneficiary of its unparalleled tradition. I agree that others may have the same feeling about their religious traditions. I believe they are mistaken. I am sure they believe I am mistaken. We shall not quarrel over this difference. We shall seek to understand it, and in understanding it, perhaps improve ourselves.

As for the manner in which this idea of superiority is expressed in our Prayer Book, it is basically not objectionable to me. It seems to me that my attitude springs directly from it. "Thanks be to God who chose us to give us His commandments . . . to give us His Torah . . . to give us His Sabbath. . . ." We are chosen not as a people but as a tradition, as a religion. Others may not believe that this tradition is superior. I do.

This belief in the superiority of one's religious should not arouse any friction except in the egocentric. Those who are offended, prove thereby that they have not learned the first lesson of religion, namely, humility. The sense of superiority is essential to every faith. Christianity evinces it in its missionary zeal. Judaism evinces it in its attempt to measure up to its own highest standards. So long as these are not made excuses for self-glorification, these tendencies should have beneficial results. *Kinat soferim tarbeh hokhmah.* Would that competition could be accompanied by cooperation in the material realm, where two cannot completely possess the same object, as it can be in the spiritual realm, where two or more *can* completely possess the same idea and faith. That this is a *tefillat shaw* in the former case, should not discourage us in the case of the latter. Religion need not always take the path of least resistance. . . .

ARIO S. HYAMS, Chaplain.

The doctrine that God chose Israel cannot be interpreted to mean that "we are chosen not as a people but as a tradition." We are not a tradition, we are a people, and one cannot choose a tradition *"from among all the peoples,"* but only a people can be so chosen. The doctrine, therefore, does not mean merely that, as a matter of opinion, Jewish tradition is superior and therefore "chosen," but that, the Jewish people having been chosen by God, its tradition must necessarily be presumed to be superior to any other.

—EDITORS

Apropos of "The First Hebrew Opera"

Sirs:

Regarding the statement made by Dr. Weinberg concerning his opera *"Hechalutz"* (Reconstructionist, April 6, 1945), it seems worthwhile to say the following:

While it is true that the opera *"Hechalutz"* (The Pioneers) hitherto has been considered the first Jewish opera, it does not seem entirely justified to deny the privilege of calling itself the first Hebrew opera to the recent operatic product of Palestine, *"Dan Hashomer."*

According to the news received here, this opera, conceived and written in Hebrew, has grown out of Palestinian life, is based upon the word and song of Palestine, and bears all the earmarks of a genuine *totzeret haaretz,* while "Hechalutz"—it cannot be denied — draws heavily upon life and motifs of the *galut.* Script as well as music is based on *galut*-characters, and it is only in the last part of the opera, that Palestine and Palestinian music play a role.

As a matter of fact, I, for one, ought to be interested to see the title of "First Hebrew opera" bestowed upon "Hechalutz," for it was I who directed the first European performance of this opera, in Berlin, and some of that "glamor" would thus fall on my baton. However, the reviews from Europe stubbornly remind me of the fact, that it was merely *"Die erste Juedische Opera,"* which I introduced to Europe, and not *"Die erste Hebraeische Opera."* Even a clip taken from the N. Y. Times knows only of "The Pioneer, a Jewish opera by Jacob Weinberg" and "its European premiere under the direction of Chemjo Vinaver." — Anyway: first or not first, let us rejoice about the news that there has come out of Palestine such a thing as a Hebrew opera, and let us strive to make a first-rate performance accessible to the people, —provided *"Dan Hashomer"* fulfills its promises.

CHEMJO VINAVER